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Book review

Locomotor Disability in General Practice. Oxford General Practice Series 5. Eds. Malcolm I. V. Jayson and Raymond Million. Pp. 347. £12.50. Oxford University Press: Oxford. 1983.

A series of books designed specifically to look at areas of general practice and help the general practitioner in his management has been long overdue. This volume on locomotor problems is the fifth of the series and is jointly edited by a general practitioner and a rheumatologist. It has 18 contributors, four of whom are general practitioners, and is designed to cover a large and important area of the general practitioner's workload.

Although there are a number of valuable and interesting chapters, the book is uneven and lacks a cohesive thread. The opening section on 'General Topics' begins with an excellent chapter on the epidemiology of locomotor disorders in general practice and includes chapters on aches and pains, psychological aspects of rheumatoid arthritis, and back pain and peripheral vascular disorders. The problem of combining a 'systems' as well as 'symptoms' approach continues in later chapters. Some contributors have attempted to cram too much into individual chapters, with loss of clarity, and many of the charts and tables are difficult to read and contain too much detail.

The chapter on back pain and sciatica is well laid out and clearly presented with a practical approach and an emphasis on management by the general practitioner. In contradiction, however, the chapter on disorders of hand function from an orthopaedic viewpoint has little relevance to management by a general practitioner. At the end of the book there are two valuable chapters on the management of common handicaps and the management of rheumatic disease, and perhaps greater emphasis could have been made throughout the book on enabling the GP to manage common problems in his own surgery.

Reference is made in the chapter on health care teams to the high level of referral for rheumatic problems. This is probably related not only to the fact that rheumatology has developed after many GPs qualified but also to the availability of direct referral for splints, appliances, and physiotherapy. I am sure the practice physiotherapist mentioned is a very rare bird indeed.

It is surprising that the only paramedical contribution is by a chiroprapist and neither physiotherapy nor occupational therapy are represented.

This book is a useful addition to a general practice library, and, hopefully, future editions will improve on format and relevance.

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